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INFO RUCNCIS/CIS COLLECTIVE

RUCNMEM/EU MEMBER STATES COLLECTIVE

RUCNCLS/ALL SOUTH AND CENTRAL ASIA COLLECTIVE

RUEHBJ/AMEMBASSY BEIJING 1578

RUEHAK/AMEMBASSY ANKARA 3760

RUEHKO/AMEMBASSY TOKYO 1445

RUEHIT/AMCONSUL ISTANBUL 2014

RHEHNSC/NSC WASHDC

RUEHVEN/USMISSION USOSCE 2512

RHMFIU/CDR USCENTCOM MACDILL AFB FL

RUEAIIA/CIA WASHDC

RHEFDIA/DIA WASHDC

RUEKJCS/Joint STAFF WASHDC

RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHDC

UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 ASHGABAT 000606

SENSITIVE

SIPDIS

STATE FOR SCA/CEN, SCA/PPD, EUR/ACE, IIP

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [SCUL](#) [KPAO](#) [TX](#)

SUBJECT: TURKMENISTAN: GOVERNMENT EXHIBITION SHOWCASES CHANGING ATTITUDES AND U.S. PROGRAMS

¶1. (U) Sensitive but unclassified. Not for public Internet.

¶2. (U) SUMMARY: Turkmenistan's first ever International Exhibition and Conference of Education, Science, Sports and Tourism in the Epoch of Great Revival took place in Ashgabat May 1-3. The exhibition provided additional hope that the government is focusing beyond empty symbols and state propaganda since it provided for some real exchange of information. U.S. participation led to unprecedented access to education officials and broadly publicized U.S. educational programming in Turkmenistan. State TV channels highlighted the U.S. Embassy information booth throughout their coverage. END SUMMARY.

SOMETHING MORE LIKE A REAL EXHIBITION AND CONFERENCE

¶3. (SBU) The First International Exhibition and Conference of Education, Science, Sports and Tourism in the Epoch of the Great Revival provided genuine opportunities for interaction among professionals. The broad range of topics largely mirrored the range of responsibilities which fall under Deputy Chair of the Cabinet of Ministers Hydjr Saparlyev. While the conference segment of the gathering included mostly uninspiring presentations, it did at least include representatives from Kazakhstan who cited the example of the "Bolashak" presidential scholarship program for Kazakhs to study abroad as a significant and beneficial element.

¶4. (SBU) Exhibitors included a variety of Turkmen state entities, some non-state educational and tourism organizations, as well as a variety of international educational, scientific and technology companies and organizations. In particular, some Democracy Commission grantees who conduct small-scale language courses or other educational programs openly exhibited and made efforts to drum up support for their programs and educational methods.

UNITED STATES GARNERS PRIME LOCATION AND ATTENTION

¶5. (SBU) The conference provided the Public Affairs Section (PAS) with a prime location - a space near the entrance to the exhibition hall. It was located near several key government educational booths and was the second international exhibitor space (after a small booth for Astrakhan State University from Russia). This placement also meant that following the official opening, the crowd of high-level government officials came by within minutes -- long

before the end of the tiring walk-through which lasted over two hours.

¶16. (SBU) Many key officials and educators visited the booth following the opening and throughout the three days of the exhibition. (NOTE: Such access to most education officials would normally take diplomatic note and a two-three week wait. END NOTE.) PAS could barely keep replenishing the supply of printed materials given away to government and private individuals whose constant presence made the booth one of the most popular. Although most give-away materials focused on education and exchanges, PAS also provided a wide-range of IIP publications such as introductions to U.S. elections, democratic institutions, or American history, and "Muslim Life in America."

OFFICIAL PRESENCE IS ALSO REVEALING

¶17. (SBU) Government officials frequently walked the exhibition hall in groups and most stopped to visit the U.S. booth. Deputy Cabinet Chairman Saparliyev and Minister of Education Muhammetgeldi Annaamanov frequently visited the booth and each time greeted PAO like an old friend. Saparliyev even ordered state media in our presence to cover the U.S. booth. Deputy Prime Minister/Foreign Minister Rashid Meredov also visited the booth and spoke encouragingly to the Texas A&M representative present. Notably absent from the frequent groups of government officials was Nury Bayramov, the Ministry of Education's International Department Head, who actively tries to hinder U.S. and other Western programs. Although Bayramov was spotted once on the second day of the exhibition, he walked alone and was not seen at the opening ceremony or with any of the higher-ranking education officials.

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STATE TV HIGHLIGHTS EMBASSY'S INFORMATION BOOTH

¶18. (U) On May 3-4, the state "Turkmenistan" TV Channel highlighted the U.S. information booth at the exhibition. The broadcast accurately carried PAO's interview about the booth and U.S. educational and professional programs. The TV channel also carried an accurate interview with the visiting Texas A&M University representative. The news report also included extensive video of the U.S. Booth. (NOTE: The "Turkmenistan" TV Channel airs its content in English, Turkmen, Russian, French, Chinese, Arabic and Persian and usually rebroadcasts its content three times a day. END NOTE.)

¶19. (U) Other state TV channels "Altyn Asyr" (Turkmen), "Miras" (Turkmen), and "Yashlyk" (Turkmen) broadcast many video reports about the international exhibition. The video scenes from the stories frequently highlighted the embassy's booth, usually showing a crowd of people picking up publications and talking with booth representatives.

¶110. (SBU) COMMENT: State-directed efforts to highlight the U.S. exhibit booth indicate growing acceptance of U.S. cooperation and programs and further legitimizes our programming with the government and public. U.S. participation allowed for unprecedented access to government officials and a rare ability to give away publications to a wide range of government and non-government officials. END COMMENT.

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